

Docket OST-2004-19626

Proposed Modifications to 14CFR 382.117 and Appendix A

Department of Transportation Folks,

It has come to our attention that you are changing the rules relating to airlines and assistance dogs. In particular, 14 CFR part 382.117 and Appendix A of that document detail how airlines will be allowed to either charge for a second seat or carry the assistance dog in the cargo hold of a plane if the creature cannot fit in the tiny space immediately in front of the assigned seat. I am writing to protest this rule change and to ask you to reconsider. There are many different ways of handling this situation and there is no need to put the dog in the cargo hold or charge for an additional seat. Please do not make this change.

I understand that the airlines are in business to make money and to do that, they need every seat filled. Furthermore, I understand that the airlines are decreasing legroom so they can squeeze additional rows of paying customers on each flight. However, I believe this situation can be resolved so that the airlines keep their planes crammed as full of paying customers as they can and still have room for assistance dogs. Cargo holds are no places for assistance dogs; currently several airlines will not ship assistance dogs in the cargo hold during the heat of the summer since temperatures there can go high enough to harm or kill dogs.

My wife has multiple disabilities and has an assistance dog who helps her through her day. As many people who have assistance dogs, she relies and depends on her dog; the dog has become an extension of herself. She frequently flies to see family members who are scattered around the country, for vacations, and for her work. When my wife travels, she always requests, weeks in advance, a bulkhead seat. At various times, the airlines have chosen to ignore her requests and she and her dog have been given a normal seat. Luckily when this has happened, the person next to her has graciously given up some floor space to help the dog fit.

I also know that when my wife travels, she has the only assistance dog on the flight; there are not many assistance dogs getting frequent flier miles. Even the case recently when we flew to a convention of disabled people held near an airport for convenience, my wife's assistance dog was the only one on both the flights there and back. If I am traveling with my wife and sitting next to her, I don't think it is asking too much of the airlines to allow me to voluntarily share some of the floor space allocated to me. Furthermore, if my wife is traveling alone, I feel that it is not asking too much of the airlines to ask for volunteers to sit next to my wife and her dog if for some reason bulkhead seating is not available. I am fairly certain that there will be a bigger line of volunteers to sit near a dog sleeping on the floor than there is to get bumped from a flight. Additionally, given the choice, most adults would rather share floor space with an assistance dog than sit next to a parent with a screaming, drooling baby squirming to get free from its parent's lap. Actually, an assistance dog on your feet keeps them warm while you are in the cold cabins.

Please do not change the rule. Do not allow the airlines to charge my wife for a second seat when all she needs is for them to ask for a volunteer to share some floor space, have warm feet, and the potential for good conversation.

Best Regards,

James R. Burton

CC:

Senator DeWine

Congressman Portman

Senator Voinovich